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## Equine Dermatitis/Mud Fever

Pastern and lower leg dermatitis is extremely common and is not a single disease but is caused by a number of different factors which can include; parasitic, bacterial, fungal and environmental conditions. Dermatitis is also referred to as 'greasy heels' or 'cracked heels' but pastern dermatitis is the most correct term.



### What causes pastern dermatitis?

- Bacterial infections
- Rain-scald
- Ringworm
- Mange such as Heel Mites
- Contact with irritants
- Photosensitisation/Sunburn which can be associated with liver disease or toxicity
- Immune mediated disease

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### **Clinical signs:**

The pastern area is most commonly affected due to the skin folds that provide a moist environment.

- Itching resulting in self-trauma and bleeding
- Swelling
- Greasy material
- Discharge
- Thickened nodules in severe or chronic cases
- Loss of hair

### **Diagnosis and treatment:**

Diagnosing the underlying cause is the most important thing to establish, and therefore the treatment is dependent on the underlying cause.

### **General advice:**

- Removal from wet, muddy or unhygienic conditions
- Only treat with appropriate medications as overuse of multiple products can cause further irritation.
- In feathered animals clipping is critical to curing the problem!
- Cleaning with antibacterial washes, even if there is not a primary bacterial infection often a secondary infection can occur

### **Specific Treatments:**

- Antiparasitic treatments for mites
- Antifungal treatments
- Steroid creams, injections or tablets
- Topical or injectable antibiotics
- Sun-cream
- Treatment for liver disease

Equine dermatitis is an ongoing issue and will very often reoccur, so if ongoing management changes are not made the disease process will only progress. The major issue is often the environment the horse is kept in and no amount of veterinary intervention can treat the problem if the horse's environment is not suitable.

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There are a range of different topical antimicrobial creams that can be used for treatment such as flomazine which is an antibacterial cream, or Isaderm cream which is an antibiotic and steroid cream.

In severe cases oral antibiotics and anti-inflammatories may be required. If your horse's leg swells noticeably it is important that a vet assess the area and starts appropriate treatment.

In horses with heel mites, an injection of Dectomax (doramectin) can be used to treat the mite infestation. Clipping of the legs is helpful, as well as some topical washes that contain ivermectin.

**Preventive measures:**

- Clean, dry and non-irritant bedding.
- Avoid over washing of legs.
- Ensure limbs are clean and dry before applying boots or bandages.
- Topical barrier creams (usually oily based) e.g. petroleum jelly. Use only on clean, dry legs prior to turn out.
- Block off muddy areas or lay hard-core on areas where horses gather.
- Early intervention is important. Treat the area as soon as the first signs appear.

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